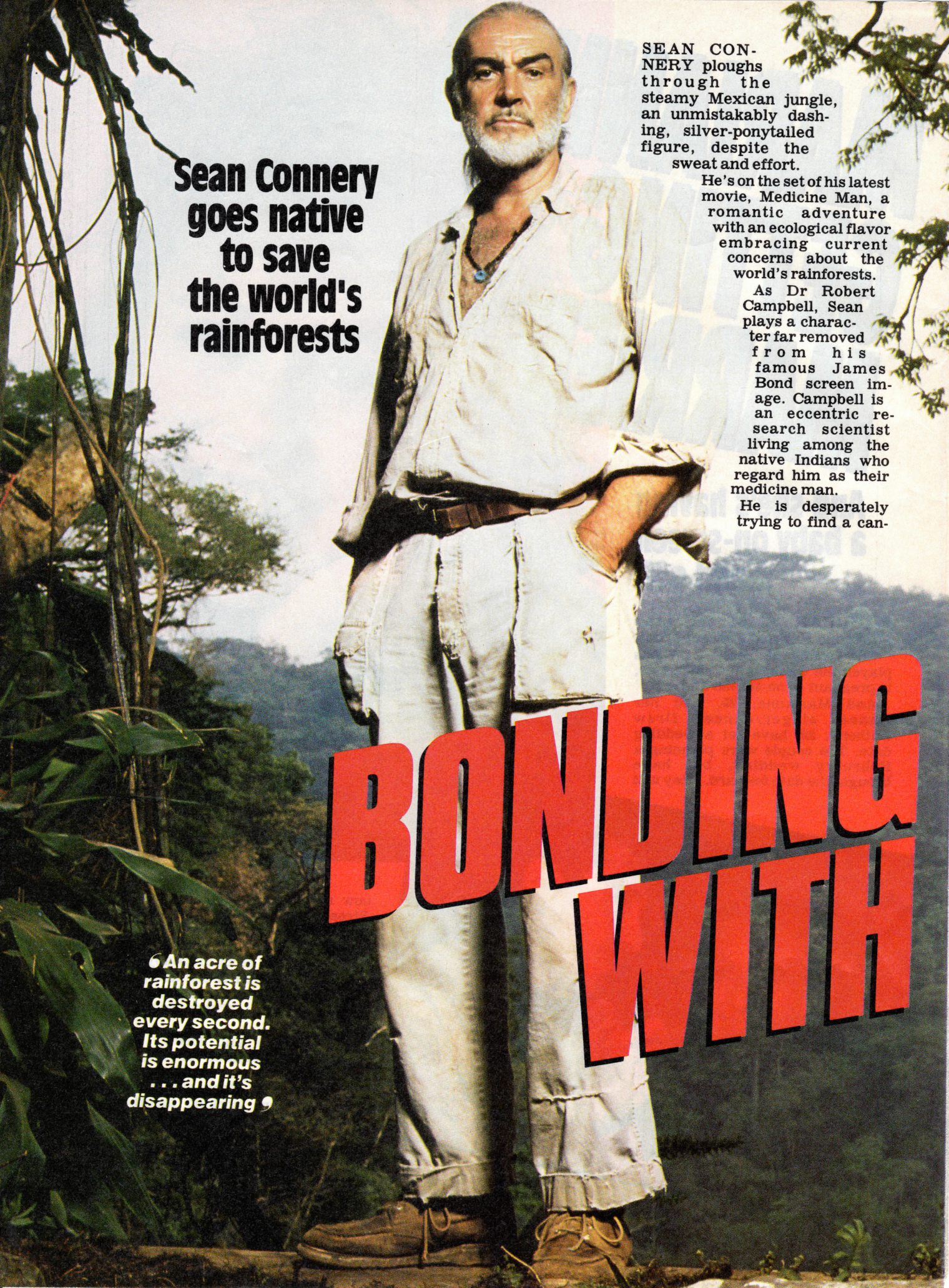


Sean Connery goes native to save the world's rainforests

BONDING WITH

SEAN CONNERY ploughs through the steamy Mexican jungle, an unmistakably dashing, silver-ponytailed figure, despite the sweat and effort.

He's on the set of his latest movie, Medicine Man, a romantic adventure with an ecological flavor embracing current concerns about the world's rainforests.

As Dr Robert Campbell, Sean plays a character far removed from his famous James Bond screen image. Campbell is an eccentric research scientist living among the native Indians who regard him as their medicine man.

He is desperately trying to find a can-

'An acre of rainforest is destroyed every second. Its potential is enormous . . . and it's disappearing'

NATURE



● Two very different faces of Sean Connery . . . as ponytailed eccentric Dr Robert Campbell in Medicine Man (left) and looking suave in a tuxedo accepting an official honor in Paris.

cer cure, the secret of which, he believes, lies in the rare bromeliads nestling in the treetops, but developers are moving in to build a road, which means tearing down the forest and destroying the plants. Enter Lorraine Bracco (of Goodfellas fame) as a no-nonsense, feisty Bronx native whom Sean presumes to be his replacement research assistant but who turns out, in fact, to be his new boss.

Although they clash mightily when they first meet, in the time-honored Hollywood tradition, they fall in love.

Fortunately for Sean and the rest of the cast and crew, director John McTiernan decided early on that the film would be jeopardised if his company was felled by dysentery or worse. So, having scouted remote jungles from Borneo to Belize, he ultimately settled on the relatively accessible jungles of Catemaco in Mexico. It was a decision that allowed everyone the luxury of a nightly retreat to clean, if somewhat spartan, quarters.

While Medicine Man is more an adventure movie than a message movie, working with Brazilian Indians — 57 from nine tribes were flown to Mexico to make the movie — and learning about the rainforests has opened Sean's eyes.

Where there used to be nine million Indians, there are now just 200,000, and the potential of thousands of rainforest plants has yet to be explored. "An acre of rainforest is destroyed every second," he says. "Its potential for pharmaceuticals is enormous . . . and it's disappearing."

Ecological concerns aside, it does seem strange that Sean, at 61, prefers tramping through rainforests in Latin America to relaxing by his pool in Marbella, Spain. A man who clearly does not have time for any self-indulgent star nonsense, he gets on famously with his co-star. "Lorraine was my choice immediately — we needed somebody who could be tough. We simply couldn't risk attempting something like this with an actress who was concerned about whether her hair was in place, or whether she was sweating. It calls for a game girl who can act."

His down-to-earth attitude is infectious.

Director John McTiernan says: "I soon discovered that not only could I get away with telling Sean what I thought, he wanted me to tell him what I thought. In fact, the only sure way to get him annoyed is if you don't speak your mind!"

Despite his idyllic lifestyle in Marbella between films, Sean still finds himself drawn back to his homeland a couple of times a year. In June he became the first person in 39 years to be made a freeman of his native Edinburgh, which he describes as "a tremendous honor", and he returned in August as patron of the Edinburgh International Film Festival. He also recently flew to France to be star guest at the second European Film Festival of La Baule, where a surprise awaited him — an official honor bestowing on him the ranks of Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur.

From Sue Russell in Mexico City

Main picture: Terry O'Neill/Sygma